

## **ABM Population Stable, Still Vulnerable**

Entrepreneur James Cash Penney once said “Growth is never by mere chance; it is the result of forces working together.” This statement couldn’t be truer when it comes to the status of the Alabama beach mouse (ABM). First listed as endangered in 1986, the ABM seemed to be fighting an uphill battle. The mouse needs vegetated sand dunes in order to survive. However, coastal development and tropical storms nearly wiped out its habitat. After protections were put in place, the ABM population was on the upswing. But Hurricane Ivan eradicated nearly all vegetated dunes in 2004. “When Hurricane Ivan ripped through the Gulf Coast, we knew the Alabama beach mouse was in trouble,” says lead ABM biologist Bill Lynn with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “Before Ivan, we knew we had the largest population and habitat occupation in coastal Alabama. But we lost 90 to 95% of its habitat, which led to a significant population reduction,” says Lynn.

Since then, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has worked with multiple partners to get the ABM population back on track. Both private and public restoration efforts have made significant improvements to the species’ habitat. “Those efforts included dune planting, sand fencing, organized workshops to replant dunes at Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, Fort Morgan State Historical Park and using Christmas trees to create dunes at Gulf State Park,” says Lynn. “The Service also received federal dollars to help restore the habitat.”

In addition, the Service launched an ambitious plan to reintroduce the ABM to Gulf State Park in 2010. The effort was proved successful. But how do we measure the mouse’s success? Lynn says the Service has been monitoring the ABM population through Habitat Conservation Plans, which has slowly documented the expansion of the mouse’s range. “In 2010, we set up 40 long-term habitat monitoring sites across Fort Morgan peninsula. We looked for signs of beach mouse activity, such as burrows and tracks,” says Lynn. “By 2012, the Alabama beach mouse once again occupied the lands that were once wiped out by Hurricane Ivan.”

The news is hopeful, but the ABM isn’t out of the woods just yet. It still remains a very vulnerable species. Just one intense tropical storm can put them near extinction. “Populations aren’t as high as they once were, but they’re stable. The best way to manage for the ABM is through healthy dunes. We encourage landowners to continue working with us to plant dunes and keep them stable,” says Lynn.

If the beach mouse isn’t enough incentive to restore the sand dunes, Lynn reminds us that healthy dunes are also good for the economy. “According to a 2013 study prepared by Datu Research, eco-tourism brings in billions of dollars to Alabama. Sand dunes play a huge role in that. Not only do they provide natural barriers to protect beach homes from storms. But dunes also provide habitat and use for migratory birds, monarch butterflies, sea turtles and ghost crabs,” explains Lynn.

If you would like more information on keeping your sand dunes healthy, contact Bill Lynn at 251-441-5868, or [William\\_lynn@fws.gov](mailto:William_lynn@fws.gov)